

Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary & Secondary Education
Minutes of November 5, 2009

A Meeting of the Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education was held at the Tiogue School, 170 East Shore Drive, Coventry, RI, and convened at 4:20 p.m.

In Attendance:

Robert Flanders, Anna Cano-Morales, Karin Forbes, Patrick Guida, Colleen Callahan, Betsy Shimberg, Angus Davis, Amy Beretta, Frank Caprio

Chairman Flanders thanked the Coventry Superintendent, Ken DiPietro; Tiogue School Principal, Denise Richtarik; and School Committee Chair, Katherine Patenaude, for hosting the meeting. He also acknowledged the presence of Senator Raptakis.

Commissioner's Report

Commissioner Gist talked to the group about her summer visit to Coventry. She congratulated the Tiogue and Western Elementary Schools for being recognized as Blue Ribbon Schools and noted that both schools have 70% of their students meeting proficiency on the state science assessment. Additionally, the Commissioner told the Regents that Coventry has the highest percentage of National Board-certified teachers in the state and has been noted for its comprehensive teacher-evaluation system.

Next, Commissioner Gist updated the Regents on the Strategic Plan. She said that the strategic agenda/plan is being built based on the vision statements that have been shared, input from the district/school visits, and RIDE staff work groups. This work has guided the creation of DRAFT impact statements, performance measures, specific goals for each of the five priorities, objectives, strategies, and milestones for demonstrating that strategies are being implemented. A timetable for gathering further input and clarification on the strategic plan/agenda is being established.

The Commissioner reported that she has sent a "congratulatory" letter to the Chariho Regional District School Committee and the NEA Chariho on their new contract agreement. She said that the district did a lot of work to reach agreement after seeking community input about improving education in the Chariho schools. The new contract calls for a joint committee to revise the teacher-evaluation system that will be in line with the Regents' educator evaluation-system standards and the implementation of a performance-based compensation plan during the 2010-11 school year.

Commissioner Gist reported that last week David Abbott attended the CCSSO Common Core Adoption Summit. It is expected that the Content Standards will be released in November.

At the next BOR work session, November 19, there will be an update on the School for the Deaf.

Public Remarks

Ken DiPietro, Superintendent of Coventry Public Schools, welcomed the Board to the school district and spoke about the culture of the Coventry School District: care and respect for students.

Denise Richtarik, Tiogue School Principal, spoke to the Regents about the science test scores for both the Tiogue School and Western Elementary School. She said that the rise in scores came about because of a lot of effort on the part of both teachers and students. She also said that science in the two schools is not taught in isolation. Rather, it is taught as part of mathematics, reading, writing, and art.

Nancy Sprengelmeyer of the Coventry School Committee thanked the Regents for visiting the district. She also commented on various education issues and introduced all of the members of the school committee.

Chairman's Remarks

Chairman Flanders reported to the Board that he, the Governor, and the Commissioner had met in North Kingstown with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to talk about Race to the Top.

Approval of Minutes of the Board of Regents Meeting of October 1, 2009; October 15, 2009, Work Session; and October 15, 2009, Executive Session

Chairman Flanders presented the minutes of the October 1, 2009, meeting; the October 15, 2009, Work Session; and the October 15, 2009, Executive Session for approval.

MOVED AND SECONDED: THAT, the Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education Approves the Minutes of the October 1, 2009, meeting; the October 15, 2009, work session; and the October 15, 2009, Executive Session, as attached.

VOTE: Approved Unanimously.

Approval of Nutrition Standards

Commissioner Gist presented this agenda item for approval. She explained that it had been reviewed at the BOR Work Session on October 15, and she highlighted the proposal, as follows: RINR is a companion piece to the previously developed Nutrition Guidelines for School Vending & A La Carte Foods. Approval of Version 2 of the RINR would enable districts to phase in the whole-grain aspects of RINR. The intent of this revision is to improve the nutritional quality of school meals while ensuring that children will continue to find the meals appealing and continue participating in the School Lunch Program. Additionally, a clarification has been made to the a la carte guidance. The term 'a la carte' is not used in the legislation that this guidance is based upon. The correct term is "snack." The guidance has been corrected to reflect the language used in the legislation.

RECOMMENDATION: THAT, the Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education Approve the RI Nutrition Requirements 2009 v2, as attached.

VOTE: Approved Unanimously.

Report on Code of Professional Responsibility and Educator Evaluation System Standards Public Hearings

Commissioner Gist reported on the Board of Regents' public hearings on the Educator Code of Professional Responsibility and Educator Evaluation System Standards held October 13, at CCRI, and October 22, at the Met School, as follow:

- Oral and written testimony was provided by more than 55 students, parents, educators, and community members at these two hearings.
- At the first hearing, Regents Berretta, Callahan, Forbes, Guida, and Shimberg heard testimony from: four Coventry educators, including the president of the Coventry teachers' union; one Cranston educator, who is president of the Cranston Teacher Alliance; one Warwick educator, who is president of the Rhode Island School Counselors' Association (RISCA); and one state representative. At the second hearing, Regents Callahan, Cano-Morales, Guida, and Shimberg heard testimony from: 34 students (most were from Providence, Central Falls, Blackstone Academy, and Woonsocket); student coordinators from Young Voices; seven educators from Coventry, Providence, The Met, and Warwick; a research analyst from KIDS Count; two parents from Providence, including a member of the East Side Public Coalition; the Vice-President of NEA – Rhode Island; a representative of CHisPA (Council of Hispanic Policy and Advocacy); the Executive Director of the Rhode Island Principals Association; and one member of the general public.

- In addition to the testimony provided at the public hearings and the written documentation submitted as part of the testimony, written comments were submitted by Ms. Marcia Reback, president of RIFTHP, and Mr. Steven Smith, president of the Providence Teachers Union.

Most comments/suggestions (on the evaluation standards) addressed the following points:

- The comments were largely supportive of creating a set of standards for evaluation. There appears to be some confusion about whether the state will implement a state-wide evaluation tool or establish standards against which local evaluation systems will be measured. Several individuals raised questions about how the standards would be interpreted in practice.
- Standard 4.1 calls for annual evaluations. A number of individuals and organizations raised concerns about resources necessary for an intensive annual evaluation, assuming that there would not be any differentiation based on prior performance. Concern was raised that if one approach is used for all annually, it will water down the quality of the evaluation.
- Standard 4.3 calls for clear identification of educators who do not meet expectations. Some individuals sought explicit conditions that could lead to loss of certification.
- Standard 5.4 calls for seeking information from students and parents and others. This issue was the basis for a significant portion of testimony, with pros and cons cited by several individuals.
- Standard 5.5 creates standards for evaluator selection, training, and retention. Individuals asked questions about the specifics of who would serve as evaluators and raised issues regarding the funding levels necessary to do this well.

On the Code of Professional Responsibility, comments were made to request changes to several bullets, as follows:

- The most frequently asked question was about how the document will be used: What is the connection between this document, employment, and certification? Paragraph four of the preamble raises this issue.
- General Comments. Some support the code; some question the appropriateness of addressing ethics.
- Standard 3, bullet 3. What are competing needs that would change assignments?
- Standard 3, bullet 8. Should teachers be expected to encourage others to enter the profession?
- Standard 4, bullet 6. Concern about requirement to support community voice rather than inform the dialogue.
- Standard 5, bullet 2. How do we protect teachers who are forced into inappropriate assignments? See proposed change.

RIDE has compiled the comments received through these hearings and prepared a summary analysis with recommendations for each of the two documents. This documentation and full copies of written testimony have been prepared for Regent review at the November 19 work session.

Budget Update

Commissioner Gist reported on the FY 2010 revised budget and the FY 2011 budget. The budget preparation continues for the FY 2010 revised and FY 2011 budgets in accordance with the budget-office instructions. Resources are being aligned to strategic priorities and will reflect the changes to the RIDE organizational structure. The Office of Finance is working with the state schools, and their budgets are due at RIDE next week. The RIDE budget is expected to be completed soon. As previously mentioned, the FY 2010 revised and FY 2011 budgets will be presented to the Regents at the November 19 work session for review and comment. The Regents will vote to approve the budgets at the December 3 Regents' meeting, and they will be submitted to the Governor and State Budget Office on December 4. RIDE continues to be very conservative with spending, as it is anticipated that the deficit will be deeper in the current fiscal year. The results of the November revenue and caseload estimating conference will soon be released, which will determine the projected deficits for this fiscal year and for FY 2011.

Funding Formula Update

RIDE continues to work on the funding formula and related legislation. The funding formula proposal will be included in the Regents' FY 2011 budget submission as a budget article and will be considered by the Governor as well as the House and Senate Finance Committees. Funding-formula legislation will also be prepared, which will offer an additional opportunity for legislative consideration. The proposed funding formula will be ready for review and comment at the November 19th work session.

Legislative Update

On Wednesday, October 21, 2009, the House Labor Committee heard testimony on H5142, a proposal that would institute binding arbitration. RIDE submitted a letter from Commissioner Gist opposing the legislation. Chairman Arthur Corvese read the letter at the hearing. After six hours of testimony, the Committee did not vote on the legislation.

On Wednesday, October 28, 2009, the House held committee hearings and reconvened as a body. The Senate did not reconvene but did hold a small number of committee hearings.

On Thursday, October 29, 2009, both the Senate and House reconvened and voted on several pieces of legislation.

Update on Education legislation:

- Binding Arbitration: the House Labor Committee never reconvened to vote on the legislation. Binding Arbitration died in committee and did not get to the House floor.
- S395Sub A (Sen. DiPalma) and H5509 Sub A (Rep. Gallison) passed the House and Senate. This bill, introduced by RIDE/Regents, clarifies the statute on teacher dismissal for cause. The legislation allows the school committee of any city/town to dismiss a teacher, on reasonable notice and hearing, for just cause.
- Race to the Top Joint Resolution: in separate meetings with House Majority Leader Gordon Fox and Senate Majority Leader Dan Connors, Commissioner Gist asked them to submit a joint resolution supporting RIDE's Race to the Top application. The joint resolutions (S1055 and H6453) were introduced and passed the House and Senate. (copies attached)
- S384 Sub A: Changes the teacher-dismissal date from March 1 to May 15. This bill was heard in House Labor and passed the Committee. It was never considered for a vote by the full House and died.

The Commissioner also reported that she had met with House Majority Leader Gordon Fox on Thursday, October 15; House Finance Chairman Steven Costantino on Thursday, October 29; and Senate Finance Chairman Dan DaPonte on Wednesday, November 4.

RTTT Update

Commissioner Gist reported that the Race to the Top application is well under development and is being designed to conceptually support the strategic agenda. She emphasized that she is committed to addressing the strategic agenda with or without RTTT, but she believes that the funding would allow the Regents/RIDE to engage in strategies more quickly, broadly, and with more partners. Rhode Island is currently involved in conversations with a number of national leaders who will bring expertise in each of the four assurance areas. There is a lot of interest and excitement from them about the work and how they can support it. RIDE is also meeting with many people within Rhode Island in order to ensure that Rhode Island's plan is connected to ongoing work of high quality, addresses major concerns, and can be implemented thoughtfully. There are five community forums planned. They will be held in Warren, Lincoln, Warwick, North Kingstown, and Providence.

As per RIGL 42-46-5(a)(1), the meeting adjourned at 5:15 p.m. into Executive Session.

The meeting reconvened to open session at 6:39 p.m.

Chairman Flanders reported that during Executive Session there were no votes taken.

MOVED and SECONDED: That the minutes of the Executive Session be sealed.

VOTE: Approved Unanimously.

Adjournment

With unanimous consent, the meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.